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# Cross-Party Group Minutes

## Meeting Minutes

Cross Party Group Title:	Armed forces and Cadets
Date of Meeting:	1 <sup>st</sup> October
Location:	Conference Room C&D, Ty Hywel

## In attendance in-person:

Name:	Title:
Andy Clark	Chairman, Royal Naval Association (Cardiff Branch)
Mike Connolly	Welsh Government
Alun Davies MS	Co-Chair & Senedd Member for Blaenau Gwent
James Evans MS	Co-Chair & Senedd Member for Brecon & Radnorshire
WO1 Robert Govier	Royal Navy- SO3 Regional Engagement Wales, West England and Channel Islands
Mark Isherwood MS	Senedd Member for North Wales
Commodore Tristram Kirkwood	Naval Regional Commander Wales, Western England and Channel Islands
Darren Millar MS	Senedd Member for Clwyd West

Ret'd Col Dominic Morgan	Chief Executive RFCA
Lt Col Taniya Morris	Army Reserve Officer, 160th (Welsh) Brigade
Emma Perrin	Devolved Nations Manager, Army Families Federation
Ret'd Col James Philips	Veterans Commissioner for Wales
Air Cdre Robert Woods	Air Officer Wales
James Garside	MMS for James Evans MS
Kate Pritchard	MMS for James Evans MS
Matthew Rees	MMS for Alun Davies MS
Daniel Starkey	MMS for Darren Millar MS

### In attendance Online:

Name:	Title:
Dickie Davis	Welsh Government
Hayley R Edwards	Armed Forces liaison officer (Carmarthenshire)
Michael Harvey	Head of Service, Partner Projects, Adferiad
Cllr Teresa Heron	Armed Forces Champion, Caerphilly County Borough Council
Jamie Ireland	Armed Forces Liaison Officer (Rhondda Cynon Taf)
Joanna Johnson	Training Manager at Grassroots Suicide Prevention
Andy Jones	Armed Forces Liaison Officer (Powys)
Peter Kellam	Welsh Government
Brigadier Anthony Lamb	Head of Youth and Cadets, Ministry of Defence

Adrian Leslie	Public Affairs RBL
Maisy Provan	Armed Forces Lead, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board
Lisa Rawlings	Chair, Wales Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committee
Cllr Peter Strong	Armed Forces Champion (Monmouthshire)
Dominic Wilson	DG Transformation, Ministry of Defence

### Apologies:

Name:	Title:
Brigadier Mark Davis	Commander of 160th (Welsh) Brigade, Head of the Army in Wales
Tina Foster	Veterans And Families Service
Cllr Beverly Parry-Jones	Armed Forces Champion (Wrexham)
Cllr Liz Roberts	Armed Forces Champion (Conwy)
Claire Rowcliffe	Blind Veterans UK
Ken Skates MS	Cabinet Secretary for Transport and North Wales
Amanda Yorke	Army Families Federation

### Summary of Meeting:

#### Introductions and Apologies:

**James Evans** welcomed attendees to the Group and noted apologies.

#### Updates from previous meeting:

a)Facilitating Self-Build Home Projects for Veterans in Wales: Response from **Jayne Bryant MS** circulated to group.

b) Enhancing Access to 'Stronger Futures for Older Veterans' eLearning in NHS Workplaces: response from **Jeremy Miles MS** circulated to the group.

c) Opportunities for Collaboration between Armed Forces and Welsh Industry in the SDR context: response from **Rebecca Evans MS** circulated to the group.

d) Ring-fencing of Funding for Cadet Expansion in Wales: response from **Ken Skates MS** circulated to the group.

No queries arising from the responses. To be kept in review and follow up as necessary.

### **Briefing on the Strategic Defence Review by MOD Officials - Brigadier Lamb & Dominic Wilson (DG Transformation)**

**Dominic Wilson** briefed group on their involvement in producing the Strategic Defence Review (SDR) and this is now moving into the implementation phase. The SDR announced earlier this year is a fundamental shift in national defence, most significant in his career. Reasons are numerous, threats are changing, more acute and intensifying state competition and the war in Ukraine. Review concluded we need to rebuild our capacity for war fighting and high intensity. Technology is changing, as seen in Ukraine. Fight is very different from what we have seen previously. Review concluded 5 major themes.

1) Return to war fighting readiness and capability, our people, training and stockpiles. This is a different posture. Learn lessons from Ukraine, transform whole structure, embrace new technology - drones, autonomous capabilities and rapid new development of tech.

2) Innovation – transform the forces to be innovative.

3) To be plausible. Different relationships with industries. World of innovation and fast pace of tech that we need to tap into. Different parts of industry and approach procurement in a more rapid way, getting into field quickly. Review not only emphasised different relationship with industry but also to drive growth in the UK economy.

4) NATO first. We don't expect to be fighting outside of a NATO construct. Returning to put NATO as the lead, with us helping NATO to transform, be adaptable and ready.

5) Whole of Society approach. Defence capability on UK homeland and galvanising the whole of UK society and make our nation fit to respond. Industrial capability, resilience at home, increasing connection between Armed Forces and Society. Reserves need to be fit, effective. Need to actively engage more young people.

**Brigadier Lamb**, Head of Youth & Cadets in MOD, Development of Strategy & Policy, continued the briefing. Five Cadet Forces, 4 being community based, 1 being school based. Work to produce a coherent and strategic approach to deliver Cadet forces. Background was a Deputy Headteacher and Reservist. This is a Reservist posting lasting 3 years. All aware of the Strategy to increase Cadets by 30% by 2030, with aim to reach quarter of a million cadets. Build relationships, collaborate, strengthen message of the value of Cadets in society and schools, and the value to defence.

Delighted that the SDR mentions Cadets. Strategic context for young people are complex now and need a sense of belonging, whether through Scouts, St Johns, Brigades etc – all are helping with this. Cadets can change lives. The SDR says we need to grow Cadets but crucially also need to attract and retain the adult volunteers. The provision needs to be valued by Cadets. There

will be a greater focus on STEM skills and opportunities, different in each of the services, and follow the STEM Career through into Defence.

The growth will be shared across the Cadet forces but it will not be uniform. There are finite resources which need to be used for best outcomes, easy wins and linked to areas of high deprivation. This is not just more of the same. This is evolution with revolutionary tendencies. We need to consider other resources, different ways, think outside the box. Need to concentrate on our adult provision for Cadets to ensure we are fit to grow.

This is a team challenge, a defence challenge, across all Government departments – DCMS, Education, Local Govt, Cabinet Office, Devolved Nations. Move away from the silo approach. Partnerships with Industry and make it as easy as possible for them to assist.

We need to have a proper analysis of how we operate now, evidence based to inform decision making. The SDR aims to expand the number of reserves by 20% by 2030 and increase cadet forces numbers by 30% within the same timeframe. This is involving many different groups, all sections and currently in the 'find & understand' place at the moment.

Questions: **Alun Davies** asked how much resources are we talking about in monetary terms and what engagement has occurred with Welsh Gov in areas where they have competency and what do you see as the key areas that Welsh Gov can participate in?

**Dominic Wilson** said he would get back to **Alun Davies** on this point. The review to date is the most collaborative he has ever dealt with. Surprised if colleagues in Welsh Gov haven't taken part in that already. We will be having conversations with Welsh Gov, Industry and International partners. Wales has significant defence industries, defence establishments and has as much a role in the whole of Society approach as anywhere else.

It was noted that the HQ160 Brigade have established an SDR Working Group to look at three principle areas. 1. Growth Deal. 2. Societal approach. 3. Cadets.

**Brigadier Lamb** said £70 million will be available for Cadet growth. Starting to work and plan now but as yet no money is in place.

**Dominic Morgan** – Reserves Forces, asked about strategic reserve resilience. Ready Reserves are woefully underfunded, under resourced, with recruitment around 60/70%. **Dominic Wilson** replied to say Reserves have featured prominently in previous reviews. Ready Reserves are already a well-established part of the defence response.

**Hayley Edwards** asked how the Armed Forces Covenant Officers in within Wales can help. They all have a mandate, various degrees of cognition from their various Local Authorities across Wales. She also relayed her role as Reservist and Mum of two girls in Cadets. Invited Brigadier Lamb to a **Reservist Day in Carmarthenshire on 27 June 2026** to speak to employers.

**Air Commodore Rob Woods** echoed the point about needing to strengthen and grow the adult volunteers. He asked how we balance the challenges to get better buildings/infrastructure as well as investing in more volunteers. In Pembrokeshire last week, STEM opportunities discussed in the DARK project. What is the lighting rod to cohere these?

**Brigadier Lamb** stated we need to build up, scale up and bring everyone together. Each single service will have a conducting point. Have to do more to unpick the volunteering and make it easier, offer more support, reach out to veterans.

**Darren Millar** asked about Defence Academies announced by UK Government. Will we have these in Wales?

This was unknown at this time. **James Evans** suggested writing to Welsh Gov on this, **Alun Davies** suggested putting forward a debate on this.

**James Evans** thanked **Brigadier Lamb** and **Dominic Wilson** for today's briefing. When the CPG reforms after the Senedd elections in May 2026 the group will ask for an update and progress report.

### **Briefing from Emma Perrin – Devolved Nations Manager for Army Families Federation**

Briefing on the work of Army Families Federation, the support/advice offered which is independent and confidential, from everyday queries to specialist MOD advice. This can be for outside queries such as Council Tax discounts, or internally within MOD. As an evidence based charity, they are able to supply data to inform policy discussions, feeding into Committees and the Armed Forces Pay Review Body. They can use their experiences and data to push to change and improvements, whether that is for particular units or wider improvements in housing, pay and the like.

Discussed a range of issues housing, healthcare, dentistry. More work needs to be done to ensure military personnel and their families are not disadvantaged by moving locations, between England and Wales or between different authorities within Wales. In childcare, there is a big disparity between the provision and support available in England compared to Wales. AFF also have level 2 Immigration Advisors that can offer help and support. Please refer to website for more details on their work. Also have three magazines – Army & You; Home Port; Envoy – so if anyone has any articles, information to share etc, please contact **Emma Perrin** directly. Also if you need any data to back up a project or policy discussions, please get in touch with **Emma Perrin**.

**James Evans** raised issue of waiting lists and that the Armed Forces Covenant should be ensuring they are not disadvantaged. **Darren Millar** suggested we might need to 'name and shame' the Local Authorities not giving Council tax discount for military personnel serving away. **Darren Millar** also noted we should ensure Military Families are not losing out on childcare provision because of postings to Wales.

**Emma Perrin** updated Group that she is working closely with Welsh Government and **Mike Connolly** added that good points had been raised during the discussions and he will take this away to look at in more detail.

### **Agreed Action points for next meeting**

Write to **Jeremy Miles MS** to highlight the Armed Forces Covenant, need to ensure Military Service Personnel and their families are not disadvantaged in the new Dental Reforms in Wales.

To receive Recruitment Briefings at the next meeting from Army, Navy, RAF and Cadets

To receive briefing at the next meeting on Wales Growth Deal

**James Evans/Alun Davies** to discuss how best to proceed with query on Defence Academies – written question or member debate in the Senedd.

### **Cadets**

This has been covered in the SDR briefing discussions. **Dominic Morgan** noted that £70million sounds a lot of money, but it will subject to shrinkage, over 5 years and when divided across 13,

will amount to around £5m each. **James Evans** noted we must keep pushing Welsh Gov to ensure any money allocated to Schools Cadets must be ring-fenced to be spent on such.

**AOB**

**Lt Col Taniya Morris** reminded Group that **Cambrian Patrol is next week, 6th to 10th October**. Anyone interested in visiting please contact Taniya.

**James Phillips** will circulate the Veterans Commission Annual Report to the group when published in the coming weeks.

**Date of Next Meeting**

proposed for January, possibly 21st. Confirmation to follow.

**Meeting Ended at 12.15pm.**

